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TAGS: [EAID](#) [SCUL](#) [SENV](#) [KCIP](#) [KPAO](#) [TD](#)

SUBJECT: SIXTH ANNUAL SONG AND VERSE CONTEST FOCUSES ON DISASTER
PREPAREDNESS

REF: (A) 04 POS 339; (B) 05 POS 210; (C) 07 POS 320

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Education and Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM) joined forces with Post to co-sponsor the sixth annual "Ambassador's Song and Verse Contest." Spotlighting ODPM's public awareness campaign ("Disaster Preparedness Begins with You. Get Ready - Better be Ready than Sorry!"), this year's event attracted hundreds of spectators and dozens of student contestants performing original works in indigenous musical styles (calypso, rap, soca, chutney, etc.) or verse (choral speaking, monologues, etc.) to educate their peers, teachers, and parents about disaster preparedness. The success of this year's Song and Verse Contest gave significant visibility to U.S. support for disaster preparedness in the Caribbean Region. End summary.

¶2. (U) Every year since 2003, Post has worked with the GOTT Ministry of Education (MOE) to organize the Ambassador's Song and Verse Contest among students in an effort to raise awareness of social dislocations. Past themes have included HIV/AIDS awareness, crime and drug demand reduction (refs A and B) as well as intellectual property rights (ref C). Students first compete in one of eight school district competitions and then at the National Final, during which the eight district winners vie for a TT\$5,000 (around US\$800) grand prize.

¶3. (U) During the week of January 21, Embassy Officers and Locally Employed Staff fanned out across Trinidad and Tobago to attend the eight district competitions and deliver brief remarks about the importance of disaster preparedness. It was the primary and secondary school students, however, who delivered the critical message to large groups of students and teachers, identifying the steps necessary to prepare for a natural or human-made disaster and encouraging their peers to develop a plan of action in case of emergency. Students also highlighted the importance of unclogging drains and throwing trash in its proper place to mitigate the impact of seasonal flooding, a perennial problem in T&T. With as many as 22 performances at any one District Contest, competition was fierce.

¶4. (U) Eight finalists, one from each district, were chosen to advance to the National Final which was held at the Queen's Park Savannah on January 29 before an audience including Minister of Education Esther Le Gendre, ODPM CEO Paul Saunders, diplomats, dignitaries, and hundreds of school children from around the country. Finalists from T&T sang, performed skits and calypsos and were treated to performances by soca star Maximus Dan and dance troupe Eklectic. Emcee and local comedienne Nikki Crosby, hosting for the sixth consecutive year, generated significant enthusiasm from the students in the audience while reinforcing the key message about disaster preparedness.

15. (U) Although the local celebrities were entertaining, the students' original performances took center stage at the National Final. Artistic, education, and disaster preparedness experts judged the finalists on content, presentation, and creativity. The top prize was awarded to a group from the Caroni District, whose chorale speaking performance of "The Alphabet of Disaster Preparedness" captivated the attention of the judges and audience members alike. The verse spelled out, letter by letter, 26 critical steps to disaster preparedness. Other noteworthy performances included a fortune teller whose crystal ball predicted dire consequences for T&T if its citizens continued to litter and degrade the environment; and a team of brothers, ages 7 and 9, whose delivery of a lengthy monologue about disaster preparedness charmed audience members. The fortune teller from Port of Spain was awarded second place, while a duo from Tobago, a perennially strong contestant, captured third place. The Embassy sponsored prizes of TT\$5000 (US\$800) for the grand prize winner, plus a computer system for the winners' school, and smaller cash prizes and Scholastic book donations for the second and third prize winners. ODPM sponsored T-shirts and bandanas for students, and the Ministry of Education oversaw transportation and refreshments (including lunch for the students).

16. (U) Media coverage was extensive and positive. A lengthy article and three photos appeared in the respected daily The Guardian (circ. 50,000), with another feature in tabloid Newsday (circ. 72,000). Local television also covered the contest on the evening news. The Minister of Education, Esther Le Gendre, praised the children's creativity and those who supported educating the public on disaster preparedness. Quoted in several articles, Ms. Geneieve Francis, speaking on behalf of the winning school, hailed the win as "a collaborative effort of all the children".

17. (U) COMMENT: Coinciding with several USG initiatives to engage

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the GOTT on the protection of critical energy infrastructure, both bilaterally and regionally, this year's Song and Verse Competition reinforced mission efforts to promote disaster preparedness across the board in T&T. Further, the contest enabled post to communicate the U.S. Government's commitment to building capacity for disaster preparedness in the Caribbean Region to a new and larger audience.
END COMMENT.

AUSTIN